

Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, October 11, 1805 , from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE J. MSS. (JAMES MADISON.)

Washington, Oct. 11, 05.

Dear Sir. —The only questions which press on the Executive for decision are whether we shall enter into a provisional alliance with England to come into force only in the event that *during the present war* we become engaged in war *with France*? leaving the declaration of the *casus federis* ultimately to us. Whether we shall send away Yrujo, Casacalvo, Morales? Whether we shall instruct Bowdoin not to go to Madrid until further orders? But we are all of opinion that the first of these questions is too important & too difficult to be decided but on the fullest consideration, in which your aid and council should be waited for. I sincerely regret the cause of your absence from this place, and hope it will soon be removed; but it is one of those contingencies from the effects of which even the march of public affairs cannot be exempt. Perhaps it would not be amiss to instruct Bowdoin to await at London further orders; because if we conclude afterwards that he should proceed, this may follow the other instruction without delay.¹

¹ On October 23d, Jefferson wrote to Madison:

“ Washington, Oct. 23, '05.

“ Dear Sir,—Yours of the 20th came to hand last night. I sincerely regret that Mrs. Madison is not likely to be able to come on so soon as had been hoped. The probability of an

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extensive war on the continent of Europe strengthening every day for some time past, is now almost certain. This gives us our great desideratum, time. In truth, it places us quite at our case. We are certain of one year of campaigning at least, and one other year of negotiation for their peace arrangements. Should we be now forced into war, it is become much more questionable than it was whether we should not pursue it unembarrassed by any alliance & free to retire from it whenever we can obtain our separate terms. It gives us time too to make another effort for peaceable settlement. Where should this be done? Not at Madrid certainly. At Paris; through Armstrong, or Armstrong & Monroe as negotiators, France as the mediator, the price of the Floridas as the means. We need not care who gets that: and an enlargement of the sum we had thought of may be the bait to France, while the Guadaloupe as the western boundary may be the soother of Spain, providing for our spoliated citizens in some effectual way. We may announce to France that determined not to ask justice of Spain again, yet desirous of making one other effort to preserve peace, we are willing to see whether her interposition can obtain it on terms which we think just; that no delay however can be admitted, & that in the meantime should Spain attempt to change the *status quo*, we shall repel force by force, without undertaking other active hostilities till we see what may be the issue of her interference. I hazard my own ideas merely for your consideration. The present state of things does not so far press as to render it necessary for you to do violence to your feelings by prematurely leaving Mrs. Madison. Accept for her & yourself my affectionate salutations.

“P.S. Let Mr. Smith know as you pass thro' Baltimore, & he will come on.”

One day later, Jefferson wrote to the Secretary of the Navy:

“ Washington, Oct. 24, 05.

“ Dear Sir,—Understanding from Mr. Madison that he would be here by the last of the week, I wrote to desire him to give you notice of his passing thro' Baltimore: but by a letter received yesterday it is probable he will have set out before my letter reaches him.

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“The almost certainty which now appears of an extensive continental war in Europe changes our situation most advantageously, inasmuch as it ensures us another year's continuance at least of that war. Consequently we need be in no hurry to make any propositions to England, but may proceed at once to make another & last effort to bring Spain to a settlement; and even if we fail, it is now much more questionable than it was whether we had not better enter the war unembarrassed by any alliance, that we may withdraw separately as soon as our separate terms can be obtained. How & where to open new conferences is the question? Not in Spain certainly, nor with Spain. Will it not be better to make a friendly appeal to France, letting them understand it is a last effort for peace, settle through them a reasonable price for the Floridas, part money, part concession towards the Rio bravo, but securing *from Spain* the indemnification for spoliations by hypothecation until she pays principal & interest. We in the meantime paying our merchants their interest & guaranteeing the principal, so that they may sell the debt as stock for present relief. I hazard these new thoughts produced by the new circumstances, for consideration & consultation as soon as we can meet. Then also I wish to consult you on a plan of a regular naval militia to be composed of all our seafaring citizens, to enable us to man a fleet speedily by supplying voluntary enlistments by calls on that militia. Affectionate salutations.”

I am glad we did not intermeddle with Armstrong's decision against the insurance companies. I am told these companies have a great mixture of English subscribers. If so, the question becomes affected by the partnership. What is become of our hermitage? As you are in the neighborhood of Butler I presume the claim upon us could be easily settled & apportioned. Present my respects to Mrs. Madison & my prayers for her speedy & perfect re-establishment and accept yourself affectionate salutations.